

HR

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January 2008

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■ **I have discovered since becoming a supervisor that it's sometimes difficult to meet my employees' and management's needs equally. I try to draw a balance, but it is clearly not always possible. How can I straddle successfully the fence of loyalty between these two groups ?**

Being a good supervisor should not be an issue of straddling the fence between competing groups. Every great supervisor knows that the first responsibility is to develop a productive relationship with employees so they can get the work done. A productive relationship means fairness, clear and good communication, recognition, and reward for productivity. This is how the needs of management are best met. The healthy workplace is not a "them versus us" game. Some supervisors do not understand this point. Because their employees are directly in front of them all the time, and their need to please is great, it's easy to hear employee complaints, be sympathetic, and feel as though they are the "main thing." Some supervisors may view themselves as "champions for the people." This is a role fraught with stress. There is nothing wrong with looking out for your employees, but if the needs of the agency are pushed to second place in the process, you will serve neither well.

■ **One of my employees came to me. She told me about her troubles at home, and I promised confidentiality. Now, I realize I should have referred her to the EAP. I feel I have information about her life at home that should not be kept confidential. What should I do?**

Talk to the EAP about your difficult situation. Depending on the type of information that has been shared, the EAP will advise you what to do. Some things learned in discussions with others should not be kept secret. For example, you should not promise to keep secret information disclosed about an intended suicide or a child being abused. There are other examples as well. You are not a professional counselor, and this situation places you in the position of making an unknown judgment call. Privileged information, and information governed by privacy or confidentiality laws that prohibit or require disclosure, are linked to what the EAP is and does. Your experience demonstrates the importance of remaining in the role of supervisor rather than counselor. The EAP is better equipped, with its experience and skills, plus confidentiality laws governing it, to manage confidential information, just as you are better equipped to correct job performance problems.

■ **I am not an organized person. I forget things, lose things, and keep a sloppy desk. I am good at what I do, however,**

It sounds like you are a creative spirit but could use some skills and coaching in how to organize yourself and delegate properly. After hiring an assistant, you are at risk for leaping between the extremes of refusing to delegate tasks to delegating wildly, sloppily, and hastily. Plan now to talk to the EAP. The employee you hire will be the most important per-

and I have climbed the agency's ladder rapidly. Now I need to hire an assistant. How do I hire someone whom I won't drive crazy?

son in your business life. Assuming you don't make dramatic changes, he or she will need to be very good at running behind, scooping up the pieces, and making sure initiatives get implemented. This key person has to cheerfully accept all this responsibility and, often, may have to practically read your mind. This is okay if the employee you hire loves this role. Some do. Others love it but become controlling and manipulative because the supervisor has ceded too much authority without accountability. Making some key changes now will set the stage for a gratifying relationship with your new hire.

■ I have hired many employees, and most are enthusiastic go-getters in the beginning, but after several months their energy diminishes and they become just so-so in their productivity. What causes this, and should I refer them to the EAP when I see this happen?

When someone is fresh and new on the job, energy abounds. It's like starting a new weight-loss program—nothing could be more exciting. But then things change. To understand diminishing enthusiasm after hiring, look at what is happening between the employee and management at the time of hire. In the beginning, especially the first couple of months, new employees are treated like celebrities. They may receive higher compensation than they had at their previous job. They are made to feel excited about the future, with anticipated achievements, and they experience camaraderie. Along with just compensation, achievement and camaraderie have been identified in many studies as essential to maintaining employee enthusiasm. It appears that in the beginning, much of what drives enthusiasm is naturally in place. Learn how to keep this motivating atmosphere thriving and you will impact enthusiasm favorably. If your attempts to fire up enthusiasm are not successful and productivity standards are not satisfactory, an EAP referral is a good idea.

■ One of my employees has returned to work following a heart attack. Is there anything I can do to help him not have another one? This is a pretty high-stress environment. Should I talk to him about reducing his hours?

Your employee should let you know if he needs any help from the agency to support his recovery, but you can also ask how best to support him. Almost all jobs include stress. Beyond stress, is something called "job strain." Job strain is high psychological demand from work pressure combined with little ability to control it. (Feeling *trapped like a rat* is a good way to describe it.) Some research has shown job strain as a factor in the recurrence of heart attacks. In Japan, the word "karoshi" means "death from work." It is a widely studied social concern. To reduce job strain on employees, try reducing psychological pressure of work demands. If possible, increase the employee's control and decision making over those work demands. What about the long hours? In some studies, long work hours alone were not associated with recurrent cardiovascular events, only job strain. (Journal of Occupational Health, No. 45, 2005.)

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